11 locations and (iii) 24 hours navigational aids. Upto March, 2004, approximately Rs. 60 crore have been spent on development of this waaterway. Another Rs. 75 crore is anticipated to be spent to make this waterway fully operational.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) and (e) The developmental activities related to capital works such as dredging, land acquisition, navigational aids, permanent terminals etc. are in progress and are expected to be completed by the end of 10th Plan. Maintenance of navigation channel and other infrastructural facilities, however, would be continuous process.

Sandheads in Bay of Bengal

485. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the MINISTER OF SHIPPING be pleased to state: (a) whether Government are aware of the fact that the Sandheads in the Bay of Bengal have become the Waterloo of many a ship in the Indian waters;

(b) whether it is a fact that Merchant ships continue to sink at regular intervals here;

(c) if so, whether Government are aware of the fact that Sandheads are well within India's Maritime limits and these sinking ships are unleashing environmental and pollution hazards affecting marine life and shipping routes; and

(d) the action Government proposes to take in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) and (b) Several cases of sinking of ships have been reported from Sandheads of Bay of Bengal. Since 1998, seven cases have been reported out of which two pertain to sinking and five to vessels running aground.

(c) and (d) Yes, Sir. Vessels have run aground near shipping routes, yet they do not pose any immediate threat to navigation. However, to ensure removal of such wrecks in future Kolkata Port is insisting that ships which call at the port are covered under Protection & Indemnity (P&I) Insurance before allowing their entry. Port State Control inspections are now being carried out more vigorously so that entry of substandard

ships is avoided. National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOSDCP) is in place, with Coast Guard as the National Coordinating Agency, to take care of the environmental and pollution hazards.

Foreign crew on Indian ships

486. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of SHIPPING be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are considering a proposal to allow employment of foreign crew on Indian ships; and

(b) if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) No, Sir.

(b) Does not arise.

Inadequacy of Indian fleet

487. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of SHIPPING be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in 2003-04, more than half the vessels chartered by his Ministry to carry cargo were of foreign origin indicating the utter inadequacy of the Indian fleet to support the country's trade;

(b) if so, whether this has adversely affected the freight earnings; and

(c) if so, the steps Government propose to take to deal with the inadequacy of Indian fleet in country's trade?

THE MINISTER OF SHIPPING (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) No Sir,

(b) Does not arise.

(c) The Government has been taking various steps from time to time for development/stabilization of the Shipping industry and to deal with the inadequacy of Indian fleet in the country's trade and also to compete in the international market. Some important measures taken are listed below: